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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was designed to survey Logan County (Kentucky) students who withdrew from school during the 1976-77 and 1977-78 school years. Of the 130 survey instruments circulated, 37 (28%) were returned. A comparison of six demographic variables, based on school records, revealed that the respondents and the original population were similar on five measures (ratio of males to females, age of withdrawal, reading and math achievement at eighth grade, and history of retention in grade) and dissimilar on one (academic aptitude averaged 6.3 points higher for respondents). The average student withdrawing during the two school years was male, 16 years of age at the time of withdrawal, had experienced retention at some time in his school career, and in the eighth grade performed at the 3.5 stanine level in reading, the 4.4 stanine level in mathematics, and scored 78.6 in academic aptitude. The three reasons respondents gave most often for leaving school were: (1) they wanted to work full time, (2) school was not teaching what they wanted to learn, and (3) they had poor grades and did not think they would graduate. Most respondents also indicated that they felt their decision to leave school was a good one. Since withdrawing, some respondents had been involved in on the job training, reading on their own, and/or taking an evening course. Attitudes toward the G.E.D. examination were generally favorable. (AN)

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A Survey of Recent Dropouts Concerning Motivation for Leaving School, Future Educational Plans, and Family History

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PREPS RESEARCH PROJECT

1978 - 79

The Logan County School System
Russellville, Kentucky

REPORT PREPARED BY:

MARIE J. ABRAM
AND
ROBERT A. COBB

RC 012512

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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FORWARD

This document is the final report of a PREPS project conducted by the PREPS Research Team of the Professional Development Network housed at Western Kentucky University and Mr. Merle Johnson, Mr. Tom Garrett, Betty Norfleet, and Thurman Nunn.

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INTRODUCTION

The administration of the Logan County school system in Kentucky was concerned with learning more about the attitudes of students who left school prior to graduation. Logan County is a rural county situated in the south-central portion of Kentucky about an hours drive north of Nashville, Tennessee. No recent study of dropouts in rural Kentucky was available to help school officials understand the dynamics of rural dropouts. Consequently, this study was designed to ask former students their reason for leaving school prior to graduation, their plans for further education, and their plans for taking the G.E.D. examination. Demographic data in the form of school records and family structure were also probed.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What are the attitudes of students who left the Logan County School System prior to graduation toward leaving school, future education, and the G.E.D examination?

INSTRUMENTATION

A three page questionnaire was jointly developed by the PREPS Research Team and a committee of Logan school personnel. A copy of the instrument can be found in the appendix.

Student academic achievement was measured with level 3 of the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) published by McGraw-Hill (1974). Student academic aptitude was measured by the Short Form Test of Academic Aptitude (SFTAA) also published by McGraw-Hill.

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

All students who left the Logan County School System prior to graduation during the school years 1976-77 and 1977-78 formed the population of the study (n=130). The sample of former students on whom data was analyzed consisted of the 37 former students who returned the questionnaires mailed to them.

The sample represented 28 percent of the total population.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The questionnaire was mailed to the homes of the 130 former students in the spring of 1979. A cover letter signed by the superintendent of schools asked the former students for their cooperation in completing and returning the instrument. A self-addressed prepaid return envelope was enclosed.

Eighth grade reading and mathematics achievement scores, academic aptitude, retention history, sex, and age of withdrawal from school were reported from school records.

FINDINGS

Description and Representativeness of the Sample

Table 1 describes the demographic variables collected on the total population and the sample that returned their survey forms. The purpose of this table is twofold. First, it describes the sample. Second it compares the sample to the original population to provide a basis for a judgment as to the representativeness of the sample.

A. Description of the Sample

The sample can be described as: predominately male (70.3% male and 29.7% female); leaving school primarily at age 16 (67.6% left at 16); having been retained on the average of one grade during their school career (108.1% retentions reported for the sample); scoring a mean of 3.5 stanines in reading achievement at the eighth grade; scoring a mean of 4.4 stanines in math achievement at the eighth grade; and scoring a mean of 84.9 on the eighth grade test of academic aptitude.

B. Comparison of the Sample to the Original Population

The sample was found to be similar to the original population in the following:

Table 1.

Comparison of Demographic Variables for Former Students Returning Their Survey (n=37) with the Total Population (n=130) to Whom Surveys were Originally Sent

	Returned Survey		Original Population	
	f	%	f	%
Sex of Student				
Male	26	(70.3%)	89	(68.5%)
Female	11	(29.7%)	36	(27.7%)
No data	0	(0.0%)	5	(3.8%)
Age Left School				
14	0	(0.0%)	2	(1.5%)
15	0	(0.0%)	3	(2.3%)
16	25	(67.6%)	76	(58.5%)
17	9	(24.3%)	30	(23.1%)
18	2	(5.4%)	13	(10.0%)
19	1	(2.7%)	1	(0.8%)
No data	0	(0.0%)	5	(3.8%)
Mean	16.4		16.4	
Standard Deviation	0.73		0.9	
Number of Parents in the Home				
1	2	(5.4%)	4	(3.1%)
2	2	(5.4%)	13	(10.0%)
No data	33	(89.2%)	113	(86.9%)
Number of Brothers				
1	3	(8.1%)	5	(3.8%)
2	0	(0.0%)	1	(0.8%)
3	1	(2.7%)	1	(0.8%)
4	0	(0.0%)	3	(2.3%)
No data	33	(89.2%)	120	(92.3%)
Number of Sisters				
1	2	(5.4%)	3	(2.3%)
2	1	(2.7%)	2	(1.5%)
3	0	(0.0%)	3	(2.3%)
4	0	(0.0%)	1	(0.8%)
No data	34	(91.9%)	121	(93.1%)
Retained in Grades -				
1	9	(24.3%)	29	(24.4%)
2	3	(8.1%)	12	(10.1%)
3	3	(8.1%)	5	(4.2%)
4	0	(0.0%)	5	(4.2%)
5	3	(8.1%)	6	(5.0%)
6	1	(2.7%)	8	(6.7%)
7	7	(18.9%)	18	(15.1%)
8	3	(8.1%)	8	(6.7%)
9	4	(10.8%)	13	(11.0%)
10	3	(8.1%)	11	(9.2%)
11	2	(5.4%)	4	(3.4%)
12	2	(5.4%)	0	(0.0%)
Total Retentions	40	(108.1%)	119	(91.5%)

Table 1. - Continued

	Returned Survey		Original Population	
	f	%	f	%
Reading Stanine at Eighth Grade				
1-2	6	(16.2%)	10	(15.4%)
3-4	3	(8.1%)	24	(18.5%)
5	5	(13.5%)	11	(8.5%)
6-7	1	(2.7%)	5	(3.9%)
8-9	0	(0.0%)	1	(0.8%)
No data	22	(59.5%)	69	(53.1%)
Mean	3.5		3.4	
Standard Deviation	1.7		1.7	
Math Stanine at Eighth Grade				
1-2	4	(10.8%)	19	(14.6%)
3-4	3	(8.1%)	22	(16.9%)
5	5	(13.5%)	11	(8.5%)
6-7	3	(8.1%)	7	(5.3%)
8-9	1	(2.7%)	3	(2.3%)
No data	21	(56.8%)	68	(52.3%)
Mean	4.4		3.8	
Standard Deviation	2.2		1.9	
Academic Aptitude at Eighth Grade				
60 to 69	1	(2.7%)	3	(2.3%)
70 to 79	5	(13.5%)	10	(7.7%)
80 to 89	1	(2.7%)	16	(32.9%)
90 to 99	3	(8.1%)	8	(6.2%)
100 to109	0	(0.0%)	1	(0.8%)
110 to119	1	(2.7%)	2	(1.5%)
No data	26	(70.3%)	90	(69.2%)
Mean	84.9		78.6	
Standard Deviation	14.6		23.1	

(1) ratio of males to females

(2) age of withdrawal from school

(3) reading achievement at the eighth grade

The sample was found to differ somewhat from the original population in the following:

(1) average number of retentions per student (sample having 108.1% retentions and the population having 91.5% retentions)

(2) math achievement at the eighth grade (sample scoring 4.4 and original population scoring 3.8 -- an independent t-test using pooled variances showed a t of 1.11 which was not significant at the 0.05 level)

(3) academic aptitude at the eighth grade (sample scoring 84.9 and original population scoring 78.6 -- an independent t-test using separate variances showed a t of 2.01 which was found to be significant at the 0.05 level)

The sample could not be compared to the original population on the following measures because of insufficient data:

(1) number of parents in the home

(2) number of brothers

(3) number of sisters

A comparison of the sample and the original population showed they were not statistically different on any of the demographic variables collected except academic aptitude. In academic aptitude the sample scored on the average 6.3 points higher than the original population. It is noted that the sample and original population were not significantly different in reading or math achievement. These data would appear to indicate that the sample adequately represented the original population in performance and descriptive variables but were slightly more capable than the original population of academic work. The report of the findings should be read with this caveat in mind.

Former Student's Responses to the Survey Questionnaire

Former students were asked to check all the response categories that corresponded to their reasons for leaving school prior to graduation. The most frequent response was, "I wanted to work full time" (n=15). The second and third most frequent responses were, "school was not teaching me what I wanted to know" (n=13) and, "I had poor grades and didn't think I would graduate" (n=13).

I left school because:

school was not teaching me what I wanted to know	13
I had poor grades and didn't think I would graduate	13
I wanted to get married	6
I wanted to work full time	15
other	8

Over twice as many former students indicated they believed they had made a good choice (n=24) as indicated they believed they had made a bad choice (n=11). No data was available for one respondent.

I think my choice to leave school was:

a good choice	24
a bad choice	11

Former students were asked to check all response categories that listed ways the school could have helped them remain in school. The most frequent responses were, "a special teacher to help me with my studies" (n=10) and "other" (n=10). Eight students indicated they might have continued to attend if they would have been allowed to "attend half-days rather than full-days."

I might not have left school if the school had:

allowed me to attend half-days rather than full-days	8
a special teacher to help me with my studies	10
not asked me to repeat my last grade	2
let me repeat my last grade in school	2
more clubs and sports for me to be in	
let me enroll in a vocational education program at the time I left	5
other	10

Former students were asked in what ways they had continued learning since they left school. They were encouraged to check all response categories that applied. The greatest number of students responded, "on the job training" (n=14) with high responses also being received for, "reading on my own" (n=13), "taking an evening course" (n=12), and "returning to school full time" (n=12). Few former students reported, "studying for the G.E.D. examination" (n=3) and even fewer reported, "taking a correspondence course" (n=1).

I have been learning since I left school by:

reading on my own	*13*
taking a correspondence course	*1*
taking an evening course	*12*
returning to school full time	*12*
studying for the GED examination	*3*
on the job training	*14*
other	*10*

Former students were asked to indicate their plans for further education. The response category marked most often was, "other" (n=15). The second most frequent response category was, "do not plan to seek more education" (n=12). Few responses were given to the remaining categories that listed business school, trade school, and college.

During the next 5 years (between now and 1984) I plan to seek more education in the following ways:

attend business school part-time	*0*
attend business school full-time	*1*
attend a trade school part-time	*4*
attend a trade school full-time	*0*
attend college part-time	*3*
attend college full-time	*1*
do not plan to seek more education	*12*
other	*15*

A series of questions probed how former students felt about the G.E.D. examination. The first question divided the students into those who had taken and passed the G.E.D. (n=4) and those that had not taken or passed the G.E.D. (n=32).

Of the four former students who had taken the G.E.D. three were glad they had taken it and one was not.

Of the 32 former students who had not taken or passed the G.E.D. 20 indicated they had heard of it and 21 indicated they would like to take it some time.

All former students were asked an additional series of three questions regarding the G.E.D. in order to contrast the responses of those who had passed and those who had not yet taken or passed the G.E.D. Former students could respond to as many categories as they chose. The first question asked how the G.E.D. had helped or might help. The most frequently used response category for students who had passed was, "helped me get a job" (n=3 or 75 percent of students who had taken the G.E.D.), whereas for students who had not yet taken the exam it was, "help me raise my children better" (n=10 or 31 percent of students who had not taken the G.E.D.).

I think that passing the G.E.D. examination has helped/would help me in the following ways:	*Passed G.E.D. (n=4)*	*Did not take G.E.D. (n=32)*
make me a better person	1	6
help me get a job	3	7
help me earn more money on my old job	2	5
give me more job security	2	7
help me raise my children better	0	10
other	0	3

Where did former students first learn about the G.E.D? Regardless of whether former students had taken the G.E.D. or not the most frequent response was, "friends or relatives" (n=3 passed G.E.D., n=12 did not pass G.E.D.). "School Officials" was the response category checked second most often.

I first heard about the G.E.D. examination in the following way:	*Passed G.E.D. (n=4)*	*Did not take G.E.D. (n=32)*
newspaper or magazine	0	2
radio or TV	0	1
school official	1	6
friend or relative	3	12
other	0	3

How long did former students prepare or feel they had to prepare for the G.E.D.? None of the three students who had already taken the G.E.D. studied over six months. Seventeen former students indicated they expected to study six months or less and four former students felt they would need to prepare more than six months.

I studied (believed it would take me) the following number of months for the G.E.D. examination:	*Passed G.E.D. (n=4)*	*Did not take G.E.D. (n=32)*
none	*1*	*1*
1 or 2 months	*0*	*9*
3 or 4 months	*1*	*5*
5 or 6 months	*1*	*2*
7 or 8 months	*0*	*0*
9 or 10 months	*0*	*0*
11 or 12 months	*0*	*1*
13 or 14 months	*0*	*0*
15 or 16 months	*0*	*1*
over 16 months	*0*	*2*

The final question probed the number of older siblings in the former student's family, whether these older siblings graduated from high school, and if they took the G.E.D. examination. It was found that 29 (or 81 percent) of the sample had older brothers and/or sisters. The number of older siblings ranged from one to seven with a mean of 2.3 brothers and 2.1 sisters being reported by these 29 students. Twenty-four former students reported at least one older brother and 22 reported at least one older sister. Of the 24 former students reporting at least one brother 16 (67 percent) reported at least one brother had withdrawn from school prior to graduation and six indicated that at least one of their brothers who had withdrawn had passed the G.E.D. examination. Of the 22 former students reporting at least one sister 13 (59 percent) reported at least one sister had withdrawn from school prior to graduation and four indicated at least one of their sisters who had withdrawn had passed the G.E.D. examination.

SUMMARY

An instrument was especially designed to survey Logan County students who withdrew from school during the 1976-77 and 1977-78 school years. Of the 130 survey instruments that were circulated, 37 or 28 percent, were returned. A comparison of six demographic variables revealed that the sample and the original population were similar on five measures and dissimilar on one. The five similar demographic variables were the ratio of males to females, age of withdrawal, reading achievement in eighth grade, math achievement in eighth grade, and retention history. The one demographic variable on which the sample differed from the original population was academic aptitudes where former students who returned surveys scored 6.3 points higher on the average than former students who did not return their surveys. Interpretation of the data needs to be made in light of this one difference.

The average student withdrawing during the 1976-77 and 1977-78 school years could be described as male, (68.5 percent male and 27.7 percent female), 16 years of age at the time of withdrawal, experiencing retention at some time in his school career, performing at the 3.5 stanine level in reading and the 4.4 stanine level in mathematics in eighth grade, and scoring 78.6 in academic aptitude in the eighth grade.

Respondents gave their opinion to a series of questions. The listing below summarizes the answers to the survey instrument received most often.

(1) Former students left school primarily for one of three reasons: (a) they wanted to work full time, school was not teaching what they wanted to learn, and they had poor grades and didn't think they would graduate.

(2) Former students felt their choice was a good choice.

(3) Former students indicated they might not have left school if they had either been allowed to attend school half days or for reasons other than those on the survey form.

(4) Former students reported having been involved in learning experiences since leaving school such as on the job training, reading on their own, taking an evening course, or returning to school full time.

(5) Former students indicated low usage of the more traditional methods of continuing their education such as attending business school, trade school, or college. About half of the respondents indicated they would pursue education in ways other than what appeared on the survey and about a third indicated they did not plan to seek any further education.

(6) Four students indicated they had already taken and passed the G.E.D. examination; three were glad they had done so. They felt the G.E.D. would help them get a job, earn money, and give greater job security. They indicated they had first heard of the G.E.D. through a friend or relative.

(7) Thirty-two respondents had not taken the G.E.D. at the time they completed the survey. Twenty-one indicated they would like to take it at some time. Ten of the former students who had not taken the exam felt it would help them raise their children, help them find a job, and give them more security. These former students indicated they had first heard about the G.E.D. from friends or relatives.

(8) All former students who had taken the G.E.D. studied less than six months. Most students who had not as yet taken the G.E.D. examination believed they could complete their study for it within six months. However, a few expected to study a year or more.

(9) Eighty-one percent of the former students reported having older brothers or sisters. Of those former students who reported older brothers, 67 percent indicated that at least one older brother had withdrawn from school prior to graduation and 38 percent indicated that at least one of their brothers who had withdrawn had passed the G.E.D. examination. Of those former

students who reported older sisters, 59 percent indicated that at least one older sister had withdrawn from school prior to graduation and 31 percent indicated that at least one of their sisters who had withdrawn had passed the G.E.D.

APPENDIX

STUDENT SURVEY FORM

The Logan County School System would like you to answer all of the questions on this survey form. After you have answered the questions, please mail the survey form back to the school in the postage paid envelope that is enclosed.

The survey form has been designed to help the school learn more about students who leave school before completing the twelfth grade. Thank you for your help.

_____
Merle Johnson, Superintendent

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1. I left because: (check as many as apply)
   ___ school was not teaching me what I wanted to know
   ___ I had poor grades and didn't think I would graduate
   ___ I wanted to get married
   ___ I wanted to work full time
   ___ other (please explain) _____

2. I think my choice to leave was:
   ___ a good choice
   ___ a bad choice

3. I might not have left school if the school had: (check as many as apply)
   ___ allowed me to attend half-days rather than full-days
   ___ a special teacher to help me with my studies
   ___ not asked me to repeat my last grade
   ___ let me repeat my last grade in school
   ___ more clubs and sports for me to be in
   ___ let me enroll in a vocational education program at the time I left
   ___ other (please explain) _____

4. I have been learning since I left school by: (check as many as apply)
   ___ reading on my own
   ___ taking a correspondence course
   ___ taking an evening course
   ___ returning to school full time
   ___ studying for the GED examination
   ___ on the job training
   ___ other (please explain) _____

5. During the next 5 years (between now and 1984) I plan to seek more education in the following ways: (check as many as apply)
   ___ attend business school part-time
   ___ attend business school full-time
   ___ attend a trade school part-time
   ___ attend a trade school full-time
   ___ attend college part-time
   ___ attend college full-time
   ___ do not plan to seek more education
   ___ other (please explain) _____

6. My educational goal for 1984 (5 years from now) is: _____

_____

_____

7. I feel the Logan County School System could make the following changes to help students:

_____

_____

****
* PLEASE GO TO NEXT PAGE *

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8. I have taken the GED examination for a high school certificate and passed the test successfully.

☐ yes

If the answer to question 5 is yes answer these questions.

a. I am glad I took the GED examination.

☐ yes ☐ no

b. I feel that passing the GED examination has helped me in the following ways: (check all that apply)

___made me a better person
___helped me get a job
___helped me earn more money on my old job
___gives me more job security
___helps me raise my children better
___other (please explain) ___
_____
_____

c. I studied the following number of months for the GED examination:

___none
___1 or 2 months
___3 or 4 months
___5 or 6 months
___7 or 8 months
___9 or 10 months
___11 or 12 months
___13 or 14 months
___15 or 16 months
___over 16 months

d. I first heard about the GED examination in the following way: (check only one category)

☐ no

If the answer to question 5 is no answer these questions.

a. I have heard about the GED examination that would let me earn a high school certificate by taking a test.

☐ yes ☐ no

b. I first heard about the GED examination in the following way: (check only one category)

___newspaper or magazine
___radio or TV
___school official
___friend or relative
___other (please explain)
_____
_____

c. I would like to take the GED examination some time.

☐ yes ☐ no

d. I think that passing the GED examination would help me in the following ways: (check all that apply)

___make me a better person
___help me get a job
___help me earn more money on my present job
___give me more job security
___help me raise my children better
___other (please explain)_____

☐ yes

___newspaper or magazine
___radio or TV
___school official
___friend or relative
___other (please explain)
_____
_____

☐ No

c. I believe it would take me the following number of months to study for the GED examination:

___none
___1 or 2 months
___3 or 4 months
___5 or 6 months
___7 or 8 months
___9 or 10 months
___11 or 12 months
___13 or 14 months
___15 or 16 months
___over 16 months

9. I have brothers and sisters older than myself.

☐ yes

☐ no

If answer to question 9 is yes answer these questions:

a. How many are older than you?

_____ brothers _____ sisters

b. How many of these older brothers and sisters have graduated from high school?

_____ brothers _____ sisters

c. How many have left high school before graduation?

_____ brothers _____ sisters

d. How many of the ones who left high school have taken the GED examination?

_____ brothers _____ sisters

****
* THANK YOU *
****